

JUNE 8

1 Kings 3:4-4:34

It will take us several chapters to get to the sobering part of Solomon's story, but the final verse from yesterday says that Solomon really loved the Lord. That is not to be doubted. Yet, that love can fade or get out of tune. Jesus gave us a tuning fork to keep our love for Him always at the right pitch. - *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.* (John 14:21) As we read of Solomon's life, we'll see that the wisest man on earth wasn't very alert to keeping God's commandments. When we read Solomon's final journal entries regarding life on earth, Ecclesiastes, we'll see that although God gave Solomon wisdom, Solomon didn't know God well at all.

1 Kings 3

Vs. 4-14 This is a very famous portion of Scripture.

V. 4 Notice that Solomon offered sacrifices on this high place. How do you process the fact that it was forbidden in the law to sacrifice anywhere other than at the tabernacle, which was in Jerusalem at this time?

It seems to me that God was willing to show a lot of grace and forgiveness in encouraging people to approach Him. Just so we all understand it, this is still a violation of the law; and this violation, sacrificing in places other than the tabernacle (and later, the temple), will lead the people into such idolatry that Israel will be thrown out of the land into exile. I'm sure it was allowed by the kings because the sacrifices were to God, but it seems to me, particularly following Christ in this world in this time, it is utterly dangerous for us to disobey and then say we're doing it for God. God's silence doesn't always mean He approves.

V. 6 As you think of what you've read and know about David, and then read the statements you see here regarding David's faithfulness, righteousness and uprightness in heart, how do you understand God's grace and kindness to us? What does God really want? Apparently, He received that from David.

V. 7 Solomon was between 20 and 24 when this happened.

V. 12 This seems like an unconditional promise. Solomon would be the wisest, most discerning person that ever walked the planet, other than Jesus. If you know the story of Solomon's life, that's pretty sobering news. Knowing wisdom doesn't mean acting wisely, but more on that later. The sin within us can make fools of the best of us.

V. 15 It's interesting that after God spoke to him in the dream, Solomon made an offering to the Lord in the tabernacle in Jerusalem. It may be that God's kindness inspired Solomon to obedience.

Vs. 16-28 This is a cool story and Solomon was probably the only one who could have pulled this off. He must have seen something in the women that told him this "ploy" would work. We can see that God brought this situation about, so that He could make Solomon's wisdom known.

1 Kings 4

This chapter is kind of a general summary of the good years of Solomon's reign. It not only shows the blessing of God on Solomon and Israel, but it shows the effects of the wisdom God gave Solomon. We'll see in 1 Chronicles that David did a lot of organizing too, but Solomon's wisdom wasn't just in poems and proverbs, he was a master of organization. We'll see this again with some other kings. A sign of God's blessing was that He gave them the ability to order the land and the worship of the people.

Vs. 1-28 The grandeur of Solomon's kingdom is not judged or commented on as being wrong. It was allowed by God. However, Solomon did some things wrong here, even within this description. The point, I believe, is to show that Solomon, humanly speaking, could have made an empire. What he actually chooses to do is something no great king would have called his crowning achievement.

V. 8 A famous movie is hiding here. "Ben" meant "the son of."

Vs. 29-34 God's wisdom in Solomon was becoming a witness to the world, and that wisdom would draw many nations to Israel.

Acts 6

Especially when thinking about the decisions the Jewish leaders made, and particularly the words of Gamaliel in the last chapter, it is interesting to wonder where Luke got his information, especially when he is quoting what went on behind closed doors.

First, Paul had been a Pharisee and may have been in some of these meetings.

Second, many Pharisees and priests came to Christ. Also, many Roman officials came to Christ. Paul mentions a guy at the end of Romans, Erastus, the city treasurer of Corinth. In this case now, in Jerusalem, with so many people coming to Christ, there weren't too many closed doors to talk behind any more.

Third, the Holy Spirit was also there, listening through the keyhole.

Vs. 1-6 Growth brings challenges. So where did the widows come from? According to Robinson's Word Pictures it worked like this:

First, you had two types of Jews: Jews who were more conservative and Hebrew in background and Jews who grew up in other lands and were more tolerant of other cultures. Those Jews in Israel and in deeply conservative circles spoke Hebrew and Aramaic. Those Jews, like Barnabas and Stephen, who lived outside of Israel, though they followed the law and didn't live like pagans, spoke their home language and Greek. Greek was the common language of the Roman Empire. There was friction between these different types of Jews.

Second, you had all sorts of people coming to Christ, including different types of Jews and widows. Widows were usually given financial help from the temple offerings. Now that these widows claimed Christ, they had lost their social security. Suddenly the church was thrust into the role of helping these new believing widows, because their new faith in Christ had caused them to lose financial support.

This situation was a ticking bomb. Believe it or not, the Jews back then were deeply nationalistic. If you mentioned the word "Gentile" in the wrong setting, they went ballistic. Look at Acts 22:21-23. Believe it or not, the believing Jews were almost as bad. Nationalism dies a slow death even among believers, and we will see this in Acts. In fact, this prejudice on the part of the Hebrew Christians will be important to observe.

V. 2 Note that there was no teaching on gifts yet. Notice too that the apostles had been helping in the distribution.

V. 3 This seems to be the official beginning of the office of deacon.

V. 5 Note that they all had Greek names.

V. 7 You can imagine that if the growth caused challenges in the church because of the need to feed widows, then having a priest come to Christ would also create some challenges. They would no longer have jobs or income. And, they would come fully loaded with a lot of religious baggage. But back to the good news, they were now followers of Jesus.

Vs. 8-15 Miracles had become a major aggravation to the Jewish leaders, but up until now, the only signs that had been done were by Hebrew Christians, the Apostles. The Jewish leadership

was already struggling with that. Now, signs are being done by a Hellenistic (Greek) Jewish Christian. O Weh!

V. 9 Some think this was Saul of Tarsus' synagogue. Saul (Paul) may have been one of those who tried to argue with Stephen.

V. 12 This is the first time in Acts that Luke mentions the people being mad at Christians. It is interesting that it was directed toward a Hellenistic Jewish Christian. There is a tone of nationalism in this.

V. 15 The *council* would have been the Sanhedrin. This was the same group that ordered the death of Jesus. Nick and Joe belonged to, or had belonged to, this group. Some think that Saul the Pharisee was part of this group. Obviously, as this story proceeds, we know that Saul was present.

So, what does *the face of an angel* look like? That sounds impressive, but in three days they will be throwing stones at him. This young Hellenistic believer was about to become the first person who was killed for his testimony for Jesus. Figuratively speaking, he is standing in the harvest proclaiming Christ, bearing an invisible cross on his shoulder. He was willing to die to follow Christ in the harvest.

Psalm 126

This psalm was apparently written by one of the worship leaders after the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon. It was a slow rebuilding process with many dangers and challenges. Some of this rebuilding, and the emotion thereof, is recorded in Ezra 3:8-15. It might have been during that time that this psalm was written as an inspiration and comfort for the people to look to the future.

Vs. 1-3 This was like phase one of God's blessing. He had brought them back from captivity. That was something almost unheard of in that ancient world, and as we'll see, it was a great work of grace on God's part.

Vs. 4-6 Now they prayed for God to turn the fortunes of the people. The empty riverbeds of the people's lives were to be restored to freshness like the empty riverbeds in the desert after a rain. There were tears that would be replaced by joy, and the one who sowed in the empty land would rejoice with a great harvest. I'm sure the writer meant this both literally and figuratively.

Proverbs 16:26-27

Laura and I were talking this morning how it seems that all of us would look and live a lot better, if God dumped us into a place where the need was desperate, where we had to care for others, where living the mission as disciples caused us sacrifice and hunger. Our bodies and our minds would be more toned and ready for action.

The reality for us as disciples is that we don't have to be thrown into the ghettos and jungles of the third world to find desperation. We live among it; the harvest is here. But it takes walking by the Spirit to see it. Unfortunately, because it is so easy to live a life focused on comfort and the flesh, as opposed to the spirit, we struggle to see the need around us and we struggle even more to live a focused life.

This *worthless* person, in contrast to the one who is forced to act because of his need, doesn't have an urging that commands his time and energy and drive. Instead, his lack of focus tends to run downhill into trouble.

God has given us this mission for our health too. Blessed are those disciples who hunger now. That hunger is a choice to be focused on following Christ in the harvest. Once we have that hunger, we can make it work for us; and Jesus promises that if that hunger drives us, we will be satisfied.